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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MARCH 02, 2009

Summary: Reports of missile strikes in South Waziristan killing at least twelve militants dominated headlines in several major newspapers on Monday. All newspapers highlighted Admiral Mullen's remarks that the "drone attacks inside Pakistan were part of Obama's policy." TNSM's Chief Sufi Mohammad's statement demanding "appointment of Qazi (cleric judges) and release of prisoners by March 15" received prominent display. Newspapers reported that the kidnappers of the UN official Solecki have "threatened to kill him if their demands are not met within four days." The government's decision to "set up new mobile courts to provide speedy justice to people at their doorsteps" received extensive media coverage.

Newspapers continued to run editorials on the political and security situation evolved in the wake of the disqualification of the Sharif brothers and the imposition of the Governor's Rule in Punjab. The liberal Urdu daily, "Express," advised that "President Zardari and Nawaz Sharif should set their differences aside in the best interest of the nation and move towards reconciliation." The leading Urdu daily, "Jang," cautioned that the "political instability can put the country's very own existence into jeopardy." Toeing the line, the center-right daily, "The Nation," observed that "it is time to cool tempers before the crisis exacerbate, with the opposition parties throwing their weight behind the lawyers' long march..." End Summary.

News Stories

"12 Killed In U.S. Missile Strikes" "The Nation" (03/02)

"At least twelve militants were killed and 14 others including several foreigners were injured on Sunday when a drone of U.S.-led NATO forces fired two missiles at a suspected hideout of militant forces in village Haibatkhel of Sararogha tehsil in South Waziristan Agency on Sunday, security official said."

"Drone Strikes Part Of Obama's Policy" "The Nation" (03/02)

"Defence Secretary Robert Gates said the United States' biggest concern in the Afghan war is the threat posed by militant sanctuaries near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The threat is from 'safe havens on the Pakistani side of the border, not only for al-Qaeda, but also for the Taliban' and other groups 'working together,' Gates said on NBC's 'Meet the Press' program...."

"Mullen Sidesteps Question On Missile Hits" "The Post" (03/02)

"Top U.S. military officer Admiral Mike Mullen on Sunday declined to confirm or deny a suspected U.S. missile strike in northwest Pakistan but said Washington was concerned about terrorist safe havens on the border with Afghanistan, Mullen said in an interview broadcast on Sunday on Fox News."

"Admiral Mullen 'Bringing U.S. Closer To Pakistan'" "Daily Times" (03/02)

"Over a series of nine meetings, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen and Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kayani have forged 'the most important relationship in the fraught dynamic between the two countries,' according to a Newsweek article."

"U.S. Attacks Undermine Pakistan Govt. And Military, Says Report" "Dawn" (03/02)

"U.S. drone attacks continue to inflame Pakistani animosity against the United States and undermine both the government and the Pakistani military, says a recent report by a major U.S. think tank, the Atlantic Council.... The Council notes that an apparent 'tacit understanding' between the Pakistan government and the United States to allow such attacks makes the situation 'more tenuous and delicate' for Islamabad."

"Swat Peace Deal Comes Under Pressure; Sufi Gives March 15 Deadline" "Dawn" (03/02)

"The Swat peace accord came under severe pressure on Sunday when TNSM Chief Maulana Sufi Mohammad demanded appointment of Qazis (cleric judges) and release of prisoners by March 15 as two Frontier Corps soldiers were injured in an attack on their convoy and an FC commandant was kidnapped. The Chief of Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi said at a press conference that he was dissatisfied with the steps taken by NWFP government."

"Kidnappers Threaten To Kill Solecki In 4 Days" "Dawn" (03/02)

"The Baloch Liberation United Front which claims to have kidnapped a UN official has threatened to kill him if its demands are not met in four days. 'It is our final deadline,' the BLUIF said in a letter sent to a local news agency on Sunday night."

"Coordinated Strategies To Defeat Terrorism" "Daily Times" (03/02)

"Pakistan, United States and Afghanistan have decided to evolve coordinated strategies to defeat terrorism from the region, Pakistani Ambassador to U.S. Hussain Haqqani said with BBC TV. He said the three countries created a trilateral anti-terrorism mechanism during negotiation and discussions in Washington DC."

"Indians Supplying Funds To Terrorists" "The Nation" (03/02)

"India has become a hub for supplying funds to terrorists under 'Hundi and Hawala' money transfer system. A private TV channel quoting U.S. Foreign Affairs Department reported that the U.S. has asked India to make effective legislation for anti-money laundering and to stop supplying capital to terrorists."

"Taliban Refuse To Hand Over Body Of Polish Geologist" "Dawn" (03/02)

"A fresh round of talks between the government with the Taliban for securing the body of slain Polish geologist, Piotr Stanczak, failed on Sunday. Taliban sources said the body could not be handed over because the government was reluctant to release their men."

"Taliban Kidnap Officer, Bodyguards" "The Nation" (03/02)

"Suspected Taliban militants on Sunday kidnapped a paramilitary officer and five bodyguards in Pakistan's troubled Swat valley despite a ceasefire in place there, security officials said. "

"Violence In Tribal Areas Claims 14 Lives" "The Post" (03/02)

"Fourteen people have been killed including 4 security personnel in separate incidents of violence in tribal areas including Dera Ismail

Khan."

"Ordinance Issued To Set Up Mobile Courts" "Dawn" (03/02)

"President Asif Ali Zardari has promulgated an ordinance to set up mobile courts in remote areas by amending the Criminal Procedure Code 1998. 'I have not gone through the ordinance, but the basic idea behind it is providing speedy justice to people at their doorstep in rural areas where no judicial set-up exists,' President's spokesman Farhatullah Babar told 'Dawn.'"

"Zardari Seeking Remedy To 'Undo' Disqualification" "The Nation" (03/02)

"President Asif Ali Zardari spent a busy day on Sunday weighing various options to seek a remedy to Sharif brothers' disqualification issue through an act of Parliament. Well-placed sources told 'The Nation' that the PPP Co-Chairman held consultations with the party's inner circles to find out a course to resolve the standoff with Sharif Brothers."

"Zardari 'Agrees To Talks With PML-N" "Dawn" (03/02)

"Chief of Awami National Party Asfandiyar Wali Khan and Head Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Sunday succeeded in persuading President Asif Ali Zardari to resolve differences through talks. President Zardari has given us a go-ahead to talk to Nawaz Sharif, which is a good sign,' Maulana Fazl said."

"Nawaz Spurns Initial Patch-Up Moves" "Dawn" (03/02)

"PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif continued his frontal attack on President Asif Ali Zardari, even as PPP and ANP leaders called on him (Mr. Sharif) in an effort to patch up differences between the estranged coalition partners."

"President Acting On U.S. Dictates: 'N' Chief" "The Nation" (03/02)

"Mian Nawaz Sharif said President Zardari did not qualify to run the affairs of the country as he was taking dictation from the U.S. on each and every internal matter. He alleged that Zardari, like Musharraf, was compromising Pakistan's sovereignty by formulating policies according to the U.S. dictates."

"U.S. Officials Differ On Iran Nuclear Program" "Dawn" (03/02)

"America's top military official said on Sunday he believed Iran had enough fissile material to build a nuclear weapon, but he was contradicted by his boss, Defence Secretary Robert Gates, who said the Islamic Republic was a long way from having a bomb."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Political Confrontation Will Be Detrimental For Democracy," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (03/02)

"As far as reconciliation efforts are concerned, PML-N chief Mian Nawaz Sharif has shown some flexibility lately. In an interview with Express News, he said that reconciliation is possible if Governor's Rule is lifted and the deposed judges restored.... President Zardari and Mian Nawaz Sharif should set their differences aside in the best interests of the nation and move towards reconciliation."

"Path Of Reconciliation Must Be Adopted Instead Of Confrontation," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (03/02)

"Keeping in mind the past experiences, and the exploits of the self-seeking elements, PML-N, PPP and all political and religious parties must desist from resorting the policy of confrontation and conflict as any such move will be contrary to the national interests, and will endanger the democratic system, and worsen the lot of the people of Pakistan. The political instability can put the country's very own existence into jeopardy."

"Time To Cool Tempers," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/02)

"The fact remains that the fate of the provincial legislature hinges on the success or the failure of the PPP leadership's attempt at creating defections in the PML(N).... It is time to cool tempers before the crisis exacerbates, with the opposition parties throwing their weight behind the lawyers' long march due to commence on this 12th...."

"N-League And PPP Must Not Break The Nation's Hopes," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (03/02)

"How ideal it would be if instead of efforts by the U.S., U.K., Germany and other foreign states for reconciliation, our two parties strive for a patch-up themselves. For this they need to bury their ego and have courage. Otherwise, they will be equally responsible for breaking the nation's hopes and destroying the democratic process."

"Return Of 1990s' Era Of Confrontation," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (03/02)

"PPP must understand the fact that any move to disregard the mandate of the PML-N in the Punjab province will be a fatal mistake, as PML-N has several issues to speed up the agitation against the government. And the lawyers' long-march will also help get faster this row. The government has no other option to save the day except peaceful dialogue on the basis of 'give and take' and any possible use of state force can jeopardize the entire political system."

"Assume The Path Of Reconciliation," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (03/02)
"President Zardari should not wait for Nawaz Sharif, rather he should act by himself as the President of Pakistan to exonerate the Sharif brothers from the cases registered by the Musharraf administration. Moreover, the Governor Rule in Punjab should also be lifted at once, and the government must immediately convene the session of the provincial assembly, so that the elected representatives may elect the leader of the house."

"Poor Zardari Is Defenseless," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (03/02)

"It appears that the President took the decision for the imposition of Governor rule on the advice of a few who wanted to conquer Punjab without realizing that as symbol of Federation Asif Zardari must act in a way to protect the interests of all the federating units rather than appeasing some.... When arbitrary decisions are taken in a party and a person emerges as 'dictator without uniform' he is bound to face similar fate at the end. We would therefore recommend that the President should go for corrective steps."

"Decision To Arrest Lawyers And Political Leaders," an editorial note in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (03/02)

"According to press reports, Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Imran Khan will be arrested if they attempted to participate in the long march.... It will be pushing the country towards civil war if the government went for stopping the long march through force and resorted to arrest lawyers and political leaders."

"Political Efforts Aimed At Ending The Crisis," an editorial in liberal and independent Hyderabad based Sindhi Daily "Kawish" (Cir: 105,000) (03/02)

"We believe that the mainstream parties need to respect one another's mandate. When the Sharif brothers could reach an agreement with General Musharraf, and left the politics as well as the country, why cannot they enter into a similar agreement with the present government and continue to support democracy in the country?"

"Testing Time For Politicians," editorial in the Karachi-based

center-right sensationalist Urdu daily "Ummat" (cir. 33,000)
(03/02)

"The patriot citizens of this country are extremely concerned about the ongoing confrontation between the PPP and PML-N, as this conflict will weaken the country, and put the national security in danger. It is a time of trial for the politicians, and they should not provide an opportunity to the foreign forces to take advantage of the situation."

"Don't Create Another Swat In Punjab," an op-ed by Hamid Mir in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/02)

"President Zardari still has some time. He should lift the governor's rule in Punjab as soon as possible and start a meaningful political dialogue with Nawaz Sharif. If his government can reach a truce with Taliban leader Maulana Fazlullah, then why not a truce with Nawaz Sharif? Zardari became President with the help of Nawaz Sharif. He can complete his term as President only with the support of Nawaz Sharif. If there will be no truce with Nawaz Sharif then President Zardari will be the biggest loser. It's the writing on the wall."

"Trilateral Talks," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (03/02)

"The meeting between the ministers of three countries is a welcome step. The continuation of talks is the only solution to this sensitive issue. The monster of terrorism is not only engulfing Pakistan and Afghanistan, but the whole world. It is the common responsibility of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the U.S. to collectively fight this common enemy and rid their people from this menace."

"U.S. Looks To China For Afghanistan Bailout," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (03/02)

"President Obama statement that the U.S. was not going to be in Afghanistan over the long term is quite significant. It is also significant for Pakistan. Lest we forget, China, together with India, is a major player in the reconstruction and nation-building process in Afghanistan. Whether we like it or not, it is China and India that form the new polarity in Afghanistan.... China and India are not exactly the enemies they used to be or what quondam President Bush thought they should become after an anti-China Indo-U.S. nuclear deal last year. Where we are more often wrong is that we desire expulsion of NATO from Afghanistan without thinking of who would fill the vacuum after its exit."

"Sweeping Swat," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/02)

"The way has been cleared for the government to make similar arrangements with other groupings of extremists in other parts of the country and it will be able to say, hand on heart, that these are 'local solutions to local problems.' Now that their hold is consolidated - at least for the time being - the Taliban are revealing their hand and it is clear that sweeping change is the order of the day."

"Need For Reconciliation," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/02)

"If the Taliban were willing to throw out the foreign militants living among them and agree to live as law-abiding citizens, the authorities should go halfway to reconcile with them. There is no other way of achieving durable peace."

"Swat And Its Implications For Pakistan," an op-ed by Abdul Baqi in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/02)

"Pakistan cannot tackle the problem of militancy on its own. To undertake such a gigantic task, it needs the support of the global as well as regional powers. Regional alignment for harmonizing interest with the stakeholders in regional and global politics is the ideal path for the future. Synchronization of both, internal and external efforts will help Pakistan to meet the challenge effectively. Such an approach will earn international support and

project soft image of the country making it an acceptable state on the world canvas."

"The Imperial Graveyard," an op-ed Ahmad Faruqui in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/02)

"Like all prior conquerors, the U.S. is not going to win the Afghan war. So what should it do? The worst option is to keep on pouring more troops into the cauldron. That will further flame the insurgency and cause even bigger trouble in Pakistan.... The best option is to pull out U.S. ground troops completely, train the Afghan and Pakistani ground forces and let them join in the hunt for Al Qaeda. The U.S. role would be limited to air support."

"Depression In The USA," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/02)

"The West is busy blaming the current crisis on American sub-prime mortgages, but the fact is that they have spent not just thousands of lives, but a great deal of money, on the War on Terror. That burden is at the root of the crisis, and until they end their illegal occupations of Muslim lands, the economic crisis will keep on haunting the West."

"Iraq Pull-Out," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/02)

"Still, there is a danger that the withdrawal of U.S. forces could create a vacuum that may be exploited by rival forces within Iraq as well as elements in neighboring countries. All regional players must act in keeping with Iraq's greater good. And if internal security remains an issue, raising a peacekeeping force drawn from Muslim countries could be an option. It may not be welcomed by all with open arms but will certainly be less reviled than an army of western invaders."

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